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SUBJECT: CHAD: REFUGEES, RECRUITMENT, IDPS, PRISONERS, AND
WOUNDED

11. (SBU) Summary: ICRC accounts for 250 prisoners (of whom some are Sudanese) and 250 war-wounded from the fighting April 13. ICRC has withdrawn staff from the eastern border for the time being but affirms a continued movement of IDPs to Goz Beida. UNHCR has cut its international staff in the East in half and is similarly unable to track IDPs at present. Recent recruitment of refugees in two camps was by SLM, under the direction of the sous-prefet. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Poloff called on ICRC Chief of Delegation Thomas Merkelbach and UNHCR Deputy Representative Rufin-Gilbert Loubaki April 15 for a read-out on prisoners and wounded after the fighting April 13 and the refugee and IDP situation in the East. The meetings followed the announcement by the Chadian Government, earlier in the day, of rupture of diplomatic relations with Sudan and the requirement that refugees be moved out of Chad if the Darfur crisis is not solved by the end of June.

ICRC

13. (SBU) Merkelbach said that he believed the Chadian authorities had given ICRC relatively rapid access to all the prisoners and war-wounded in the aftermath of the fighting. He sent a strong message of official complaint to the government about the display of prisoners at the parade ground on April 14. His staff had counted approximately 250 prisoners, of whom 70-80 were wounded and were at present at Central Military Hospital. The remaining 170-180 prisoners were not wounded or only lightly wounded and in cramped quarters, but ICRC believed they would soon be transferred to a larger setting; the government had not been prepared for this number of prisoners or wounded. ICRC had observed over 200 wounded persons at the military hospital (of whom the 70-80 prisoners, plus approximately 130 Chadian military), while the French had transported 30-40 wounded Chadian military to France for treatment. Meanwhile, he said, MSF had observed 85 wounded civilians at the general hospital. (Note: The latter figure, of civilian wounded, appears to be very low, on the basis of eye-witness accounts that many civilians were caught in cross fire, provided by our FSNs and Muslim contacts living in the sections of the city most affected by the fighting. End Note.)

14. (SBU) On the issue of nationality of the prisoners, Merkelbach said that ICRC had not been able to do in-depth interviews as yet, but it appeared there were "some" men of Sudanese nationality among the prisoners. However, ICRC was treating the issue as Chadian-versus-Chadian, an internal conflict, in which Sudan was not attacking Chad but supporting Chad's dissidents, just as Chad supported Darfur rebels (witness, Merkelbach said, the assistance just offered by the SLM in attacking Chadian rebels around Adre). As for the ages of prisoners, ICRC had not been "shocked" by what it had seen -- many of the rebel soldiers were young, late adolescents, but none appeared to be early adolescents.

15. (SBU) On the situation in the East, Merkelbach said ICRC had withdrawn its staff for the time being into Abeche so it was not able to keep close tabs on the Chadian IDPs. The ICRC team that had been near the Sudanese border at Dogdore (near Mongororo) had departed for Abeche the night of April 12 when a group of Chadian military arrived and demanded ICRC transport ten wounded Chadian soldiers to Abeche. These soldiers had been wounded in fighting at Tizi, at the tri-juncture of the Sudanese, Chadian, and CAR borders. Merkelbach said he did not know how soon he would have people back at the border to keep track of IDPs (MSF was also gone), but it was clear that IDPs had continued to move from the border into the prefectural capital of Goz Beida, with perhaps 7,000 IDPs present there now. Merkelbach was concerned that UNICEF and others were chomping at the bit to begin major deliveries of assistance, which would, in his opinion, guarantee a major increased flow of IDPs toward Goz Beida.

UNHCR

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16. (SBU) Loubaki had just returned from a swing through the southern (i.e., mainly Masalit) refugee camps. After the rebel occupation of the office in Koukou and the camp at Goz Amer April 10, the refugees were nervous about the possibility of further such incidents. The rebel force appeared to have come from the south, where there had been fighting, and appeared to depart in the direction of Goz Beida, where the Chadian armed forces had been staging major reinforcement, but they had never arrived in Goz Beida and simply disappeared from the area. UNHCR had no personnel on the border and was unable to say much on the status of IDPs (mainly Dajjo) there, but it was clear that the numbers of IDPs moving into Goz Beida were increasing. Meanwhile, there was reduced pressure from Masalit IDPs on Gaga camp further north, as the IDPs realized no new camp was being set up for them, and they chose to return to their Masalit area along the border, which was relatively calm at present.

17. (SBU) Loubaki said that UNHCR had decided to reduce its international staff in the East from over 20 to approximately 10, keeping two at each of the 5 field offices (Bahai, Iriba, Farchana, Goz Beida, Goz Amer), in addition to the local staff. There had been no other recent security problems, except for the brief rebel takeover at Koukou - Goz Amer.

18. (SBU) Loubaki said that there had been thus far no repercussions on the refugee camps or in IDP movements due to the recent fighting in Adre, though his staff was aware of movement of casualties to Guereda and Farchana. UNHCR staff in El-Geneina, being significantly closer to Adre than UNHCR staff in eastern Chad, had reported hearing heavy and prolonged bombardments.

19. (SBU) Following the announcement earlier in the day of the "deadline" to remove refugees from Chad, Loubaki said, the UNHCR Representative and he had met with the Minister of Territorial Administration Mahamat Ali for a clarification of the Chadian position. Mahamat Ali had not seemed to dwell on the "deadline" but rather on the urgent need for a clearer

statement by the international community condemning Sudanese aggression, increased assistance to Chad in caring for and protecting the refugees, and a speeding up of stationing UN troops on the border. Loubaki said that the "deadline" did not seem serious in itself. The government had presumably thrown refugees into the mix of rupture with Sudan and of oil production as a way to get international attention. It seemed hardly plausible for the government to contemplate forcing refugees out when the majority of the refugees were Zaghawa (same ethnicity as the ruling regime) and when the Zaghawa rebels in Darfur were now offering the Chadian government considerable help in attacking Chadian rebels present in Darfur.

¶10. (SBU) Loubaki offered an update on the discovery of recruitment in the Bredjing and Treguine camps. The facts remained as reported earlier, but further witness accounts confirmed two key elements. First, the recruitment was for the Masalit wing of the SLA under the command of Col. Khamis (formerly with the SPLA in Eritrea). Second, the sous-prefet at Hadjar Hadid was more than complicit, he was deeply and actively involved. He had organized recruitment gatherings, ordered recruits to depart, and ordered gendarmes to facilitate their travel. He had hotly denied any foreknowledge and even threatened to take UNHCR to court, but UNHCR was certain of his guilt.

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